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SUBJECT: Abyei Conflict Contained for Now, But Problem Unresolved

Ref: Khartoum 256

11. (SBU) Summary: SPLM-appointed Abyei administrator Edward Lino says that conflict in Abyei has been "contained," in what he calls a defeat for NCP hardliners. The NCP and SPLM, however, appear to have been unable to conclude an agreement on joint administration. According to Foreign Minister Deng Alor, the main obstacle is the dispute over Abyei's northern boundary. Meanwhile, self-appointed Misseriya Abyei Governor al-Ansari has dissolved his administration under pressure from the Misseriya High Council. End Summary.

Edward Lino: Conflict Contained

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12. (SBU) On February 21 USAIDoff met with Edward Lino, the Sudan Peoples' Liberation Movement (SPLM) appointed Governor of Abyei and Choul Arop, his newly appointed Minister of Agriculture and Natural Resources. According to Lino, the Deputy-Governor position will be NCP-appointed. Lino was in Khartoum to meet with both SPLM and NCP leadership. Lino asserted that the National Congress Party (NCP) is divided on the Abyei issue. He termed one group the "hawks", including Presidential Advisor Nafie Ali Nafie, who are pushing for war with the intent to derail the CPA and create a separate Northern government in Abyei. The other group, including President Bashir, wants to contain the Abyei situation. Lino said that a high-ranking NCP official, when hearing that President Bashir was considering accepting a reconciliation on the Abyei administration issue asked: "Why are you reconciling the Misseriya and Dinka; don't you know that they (the Misseriya) are my reserve forces to fight the SPLA?"

A Sincere Promise of Peace?

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13. (SBU) Lino had just come from a meeting with the head of Sudan's Military Intelligence, who promised to open the road leading to Abyei and who indicated that a national resolution on Abyei looks likely. Lino said that he told the Military Intelligence head that although opening the road would signal good intentions, the road opening was not the SPLM's priority. The SPLM are concerned about bringing peace to the area. (Note: To date the road remains closed. End Note.) Lino said that a resolution to the Abyei administration dispute is possible (but not guaranteed) because of mounting pressure on the Presidency, including from Misseriya leaders.

Al-Ansari a Non-Concern

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14. (SBU) Lino dismissed self-appointed Misseriya Abyei "Governor" Muhammed Umar al-Ansari as a non-concern. He described Al-Ansari's actions as politically reckless. The Higher Council of the Misseriya, including Abdal Rasool al Nor, Ahmed Salih Saluba, Adam Sabir, Abdal Rahman Al Hassan, Mahdi Babu Nimir and Al Heir Al Fahim, publicly issued a decree renouncing Al-Ansari's actions and stating that he does not represent the Misseriya. Al-Ansari

subsequently dissolved his government.

Conflict within the SPLM

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15. (SBU) On February 23, Dirdeiry Mohamed Ahmed, an NCP member of Parliament and member of the six-man committee dealing with Abyei, told Poloff that on February 21, the NCP and the SPLM reached agreement in principle on the joint administration of Abyei. Under the agreement, Dirdeiry said that the SPLM will nominate a Chief Administrator and the NCP will nominate the Deputy Administrator. (Note: This agrees with what Lino told USAIDoff. End Note.) Dirdeiry said that the NCP will accept any person the SPLM names as Chief Administrator, including Edward Lino.

16. (SBU) According to Dirdeiry, the NCP has "remained engaged on Abyei" since February 21 and has met with the SPLM several times on the issue at different levels. In their February 21 meeting, President Bashir and First VP Kiir agreed on the need for the two parties to draft a written agreement on the interim administration in Abyei, which Bashir and Kiir would sign.

17. (SBU) Later on February 21, the SPLM and the NCP discussed this draft agreement. According to Dirdeiry, while SPLM Secretary General Pagan Amum and others accepted the text, the SPLM's Deng Alor rejected it. (Deng is Foreign Minister in the Government of National Unity (GNU) and an Abyei native.) Deng believes that several issues in the draft agreement need to be "revisited," according to Dirdeiry. Dirdeiry said that "Deng and Pagan are not seeing eye to eye on several issues with regard to Abyei." (Note: Dirdeiry refused to be drawn out on Deng's objections, but on February 25, Deng told SE Williamson that Abyei's northern border is the primary difficulty - see para. 9. End note.)

18. (SBU) Dirdeiry said that the NCP needs to have Deng "on board"

KHARTOUM 00000298 002 OF 002

with the agreement. Several NCPers met with Deng in his home February 22 in an attempt to win his support for the draft agreement. Dirdeiry said that, despite progress, Deng became "furious" when he was unable to persuade Pagan and the NCP to make changes to the draft text. Pagan and the NCP told Deng that the two parties must move forward immediately with some kind of solution.

Deng Alor: Abyei Unresolved

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19. (SBU) On February 25, Deng Alor himself confirmed to Special Envoy Williamson that the SPLM and NCP have been unable to resolve the Abyei dispute. He indicated that the Abyei Boundary Commission (ABC) report and the location of Abyei's northern border are the main obstacle. Deng said that, as a prominent SPLMer from the region, he hears from Abyei residents when things are going wrong. Presumably referring to the meetings described by Dirdeiry, Deng said that a joint NCP-SPLA committee has been working on the issue, but without success so far. A delegation led by Pagan and including SAF and SPLA officers was to travel to Abyei that same morning to hold talks with Ngok Dinka and Misseriya. Deng said that Vice President Kiir and Pagan would be able to shed more light on the issue when they meet SE Williamson.

Comment

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110. (SBU) The NCP and SPLM appear to have come close to an agreement on Abyei administration following the February 21 Bashir-Kiir meeting, but then came to grief when trying to work out specifics. The location of Abyei's Northern boundary is one fraught with emotion for Southerners and is unlikely to be resolved as long as the NCP rejects the ABC report. Edward Lino's confidence and al-Ansari's stepping down, apparently under pressure from fellow Misseriya, indicate that the two sides have stepped back from the brink of conflict, at least for now.

FERNANDEZ